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ABSTRACT

British environmental education differs somewhat from that of the United States. In the U.S. "environmental education" refers to the teaching of a set of concepts by which one might learn to appreciate, conserve and protect the natural environment. In Great Britain many of the same objectives and procedures of the U.S. system are employed, but they are accomplished through more varied means. Conservation is still of importance, but the impact is stressed through more direct involvement of the individual through both formal activities and recreational experiences where pleasure and appreciation are part of the expected results. Environmental education in Great Britain was influenced by two issues: (1) the work of environmentalists in their efforts to clean up the material and aesthetical spoilage left by the industrial revolution and (2) the emergence of the environment as a teaching tool that could take children out of the classroom into the reality of a first-hand experience. Environmental education in England takes many forms from natural studies in the class to week-long trips to Field Study Centers where skills such as camping or sailing are taught. The final section of this paper describes three examples of environmental activities in which the author participated. These included a town survey, compass activities, and a trip to a county environmental center where children may visit from one day to a week to learn specific activities and apply lessons learned in class. (DS)

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BRITISH ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION: A PERSPECTIVE

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BRITISH ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

PART ONE: PERSPECTIVE

In order to properly begin this perspective, it is first necessary to in some way limit and define the term for "environmental education". In the U.S. "environmental education" refers to the teaching of a set of concepts by which one might learn to appreciate, conserve (a vital term here) and protect the natural environment. This would include such areas as air quality, forests, woodlands, lakes and even the urban environment where natural beauty and the aesthetics related to it are rapidly disappearing.

Education to save the environment is being lost to commercial interests and public apathy in general. Environmental education is needed to protect that which is still intact and encourage future planning to compensate for current mismanagement. Environmental education includes studies which deal with air, water and soil pollution and its causes, land management, proper farming techniques and other similar areas all aimed at improving the quality of the natural environment.

Environmental education involves pupils in experimental activities. Field trips are employed to show how man is currently trying to maintain his environment and, in some cases, reclaim it from intense misuse. Plot studies enable a child to understand cycles in nature and how tampering with these cycles may ultimately affect the existance of man.

Another segment of environmental education includes group or community action. This often includes community clean ups, beautification, or the preservation of some endangered man-made or natural area. Lastly, environmental education in the U.S. includes formal studies where precise relationships between man and the environment are stressed order to produce an informed and environmentally literate society.

In Great Britain, many of the same objectives and procedures, are accomplished through more varied means. The notion of land, water and air conservation is still of great importance, yet the impact for their preservation and enhancement is stressed through more direct involvement of the individual through both formal and recreational types of eductiion. Not only is there direct teaching about the environment, but experience in the environment where pleasure and appreciation are part of the expected results is also stressed. This emphasis may then result in life-long outdoor pursuits such as hiking, canoeing, sailing, orienteering, etc. In this way it is expected that appreciation and concern for the environment may grow and become self-fostering.

Thus, our two nations have similar objectives, yet differences can be noted in approach and procedure. If one were to include recreation education in the American concept of environmental education, a greater similarity would be noted. This similarity would still not be identical, however, for even though the methods employed might now agree, objectives and expectations would still differ.

PART TWO: ISSUES SEEM AS INSTRUMENTAL IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION IN GREAT BRITIAN

In order to acquaint the reader with the development of environmental education in Great Britain, one needs to view two issues. Through they eventually culminated in the present concept of British environmental education originally they were different (though related) issues.

The first issue deals with environmentalists in England and their efforts at cleaning-up the spoilage, (both materially and aesthetically,) left as a result of the industrial revolution. These environmentalists formed societies to remedy the circumstances brought on by the industrial revolution. These groups supported the establishment of (1) proper labor laws (2) basic dwelling standards and (3) full educational opportunities.

Environmentalists, especially after 1945, became adamant in their zeal to replant forests, return slag heaps to their past contours, insure air and water quality (through supporting candidates in elections) and to reawaken Britains to the beauty of their land and its heritage.

Many people felt that a new generation was growing-up in Britain that was being made more aware of places and events throught out the world via the media (T.V. and radio). Some feared that immediate social roots might become less important and eventually town and local heritage forgotten. Heritage, it was felt should be preserved, enriched and transmitted to future generations. Thus, people began to recognize the importance of maintaining and improving the quality of their local environment.

As a result, various groups launched campaigns which emphasized that the environment might best be controlled by respecting it. These organizations encouraged direct, active involvement in environemntal concerns and issues over a period of time. The Council for the Preservation of Rural England (first organized in 1926) sought for vigorous political and educational activity on a national scale to protect the environment. The Council urged that certain structures of historical value be renovated by the communities where they were located. They encouraged schools to use the community as an educational resource for studying geography and history. They organized hiking gourps to restore concern and appreciation for the natural environment. This, inturn, created a growing interest in camping and climbing plus helped develop the hostel system present in Britain today.

Books, such as Rachel Carson's Silent Spring and John K. Galbraith's Affluent Society began to build-up fears of a doomsday premonition for people in both the United States and Britain. Messages like this similarly added credence to what environmentalists around the world had been saying about the dangers of pollution.

As a result of concerns generated by individuals and societies, there occured in Britain (1) a slow but steadly growing interest in the environment, (2) the wish to restore a local feeling for tradition and heritage, and (3) the emergence of "outdoor societies". Through these actions it was felt, the beauties of the natural world, when experienced, would deepen an appreciation and thus a respect for the wise use of land, air and water.*

While all this activity was taking place on environmental issues, educators themselves had, for some time, been tending in the direction of communtiy and environmental concern, but for different reasons.

To go back a bit, three eminent European educators of their day were stressing the use of the environment as a teaching tool. Pestalozzi, emphasized that education was best done through observation and direct participation. Froebel, suggested that the environment supplied material for his own mind to work and so insisted that things be studied in their natural connections (first hand experience). Montessori, stressed the importance of activity in the discovery process of learning while Piaget urged that there must be continuous interaction between the learner and his environment if a correct picture of the world was to properly evolve.

In general, these educators were saying that learning in a school room from ordinarily just one person and using only books was a very superficial way to teach children about the world. Emphasis, they maintained, should be placed on the active involvement of the learner, through direct, first-hand experience. This is necessary if meaningful and realistic education is to occur. These educators realized that problems in life did not appear neatly labeled as math, science, geography, etc. They placed special emphasis on the integration of the school curriculum with experimental learning in the local environment.

Further, one needs to look directly at British education where the gradual use of the out-of-doors as an extension of the classroom can be seen. Past evidence of this development is somewhat isolated and fragmented, while growth after 1945 is quite extensive.

As early as 1860, the use of the school environment as a stimulus for creative work in language arts, crafts and history was suggested by His Majesty's Inspectorate of Schools. A few years later, this advice was followed by still further encouragement for using the environment for gathering data for historical, sociological and geographical studies. Yet, during this time (1860-1900) even as ideas of direct experience were being verbally accepted, they were seldom practiced. The formal walk through the garden or town was used perhaps more for a reward for good behavior or attendance rather than for what its promoters intended it to be.

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* Due to the pressure of a conservation lobby, a Clean Air Standards Act was passed in 1964 which vertually eliminated coal as a fuel for home heating. This measure has greatly helped to clean-up Britain's terribly polluted air.

As time passed and the ideas of Froebel and Pestalozzi became more accepted, educators in Britain turned more to the use of the environment as teacher. Geographers soon found that students could associate more with their studies if reality played a greater role in their academic life. Thus, field study became a part of some geography courses providing a more varied and interesting approach. This method also tended to make information learned from books more understandable. Yet, as the "eleven-plus exams" only required repetition of information learned from study, this new approach was not readily practiced all over England.

In the early days of compulsory education, government grants to schools were dependent on standards reached in specific subjects which required a great deal of memorization. Even as environmental eeducation was beginning to be accepted, the strong influence that government grants exerted and the insistance on memorization as a mode of learning tended to make schools bear little or no relationship to life.

During the years 1889 to 1920, the philosophy of Patrick Geddes stimulated "reality-based" education. Geddes argued that a child brought into contact with the profound realities of his environment would not only be more likely to learn better, but would also develop a creative attitude toward his surroundings. Geddes opened his own school called "The Outlook Tower" in Edinburgh, Scotland. Here he tried to put his ideas into practice and foster the three H'S; (head, hand and heart) as well as the three R'S.

The Le Play Society, strongly motivated by the ideas of John Dewey, in 1930, published a booklet titled, An Introduction to Regional Surveying, where environmental study in schools was emphasized. Later, in 1938, the society formed an organization that worked closely with schools and brought people into the classroom to tell about their lives. This was another attempt to try to bring some measure of reality into the structure and objectives of English education.

The new architectural design of Schools in the Sixties allowed freer contact with the outside world. Field trips were heavily emphasized as part of teacher training in colleges, especially during the Fifties and Sixties. The abolishment of the 11-plus exams in many areas freed teachers to teach in a way more consistant with a child's development, as indicated by Piaget and Froebel.

In 1968, The Council for Environmental Education was formed. This council did not represent a final recognition of one group by the other, but sought to strengthen a growing trend where each group adopted and utilized the objectives of the other; a synthesis of goals. The Council for Environmental Education worked to combine biology with environmental perspective by holding a yearly conference, and by publishing re ource lists and newsletters which were distributed to teachers throughout England.

Another organization was formed in 1969. George Martin became the first president of the Society for Environmental Education. This organization stressed the use of the environment for educational purposes plus education for the environment. By 1970, a degree was being offered in environmental science, which when applied to education, naturally tended to fuse the two.

With the emergence of a group composed mainly of educators and environmentalists who were trying to combine their philosophies for the benefit of each other, there also arrived on the scene new definitions of environmental education. Although the definitions were worded differently they tended to reflect the same ideals. For example, to some, environmental education meant the stimulation of inquiring into factors governing the environment and interaction between the environment and man. To others, environmental education was recognizing values and clarifying concepts in order to understand and appreciate the interrelatedness among man, his culture and his bio-physical surroundings. Environmental education also entailed practice in decision making and forming ones own code of behavior. To others, it was considered a means of helping children develop a wide range of skills for observing, recording and interpreting their world. Environmental education was also viewed as including the development of the concept of space, time and structure through which children can relate to the physical and social world around them. And lastly, environmental education was viewed as an enjoyable experience where appreciations can be developed, not only for the quality of the environment, but for the quality of life.

Thus we see that, in general, the historical pattern for development of the term, environmental education had two primary motivating forces. Yet, in all likelihood, it was these two forces plus the ideas and activities of many people who stood somewhere between the environmentalists and educationalists who also helped to mold the current philosophy.

As to a trend that may be developing, it is clear from visits made to Environmental Education Centers, Outdoor Education Centers, and Field Study Centers that the local authorities in each county are a force that has a great deal to do with determining in what way environmental education will be implemented. For example, in Buck's County, there were at least five centers where children would come for a few days up to one week. In all but perhaps one (where actual camping was done), nature-related activities were heavily stressed. On the other hand, in Northumberland County, there were many outdoor centers where a variety of outdoor skills and appreciations were emphasized, as well as nature-related activities.

In the schools visited, local and town environments were being used as well as many natural studies going on right in the classroom. Some classes seemed to be just trying out new ideas while others had been going to field study centers, on a regular basis with pre-trip and follow-up activites well planning out. Only in two instances were schools observed not using the environment either for motivation or as a result of studies conducted from a book in the classroom.

Thus, no clear trend was seen, save for the motivating force of certain individuals in schools and the support given by the local authorities. In some Field Study Centers, skills such as camping, sailing and fell-walking seemed to be heavily emphasized, yet these activities were not intended to produce proficient sportsmen, but rather to act as a catalyst to spark an attitude of appreciation and respect for the natural environment and to put skills to work that had been learned in the classroom.

One trend definitely not apparent in Great Britain was a lavishly financed program. Yet in all, there seemed to be programs where teachers were developing lessons and activities which tried to capture the natural enthusiasm of children, put learned skills to work in some concrete form and, in general, personalize the educational process (three H's).

PART THREE: EXAMPLES OF BRITISH ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

This section briefly sketches three examples of environmental activities in which the author participated, while in Britain. The relationship of the activities to educational objectives is also cited.

A town survey can be conducted in almost any locality. On an initial survey by the class, many types of items may be noted which in some way identify the town's "character". Architecture may reveal a bit of history. Make and model of cars parked along the road can serve as a barometer of economic level.

On subsequent visits, children might sketch certain buildings, graph makes of cars, conduct interviews, write-up reports of their findings, construct a book to tell about the way in which some business is run, compose poetry describing some part of town, etc. The list of suggestions is virtually endless.

In every case though, each activity should be built on a skill previously taught (or just introduced) and apply that skill utilizing a direct, firsthand approach. Such a study not only helps emphasize skills, but contributes much to children's understanding about their town, its people and "what makes it tick". Hopefully, this would help develop an attitude of greater respect for the area in which they live.

Further, this type of activity frequently proves to be a stimulus to students who so often underachieve in a classroom situation. Yet, one should be careful to structure the activity logically, lest it become an experiment where students wind-up confused over expectations and much time is there-by wasted. Careful preparation will greatly encouage the success of the students involved.

A second activity may involve the compass. Right away, numbers are related to direction and so immediately link them to something real and not totally abstract. Many geometrical shapes can be visually expressed. This can be done by physically stepping them out from a prepared instuction sheet giving degrees and paces.

If a compass trail is being used, a teacher can easily tie in conservation concerns by posing a question at each stop that can be answered by observing the natural or man-made environment in the surrounding area. Simply completing a compass course often gives children a sense of accomplishment and may stimulate them to make up one of their own. Numbers, written directions and social interaction all come into play. Ultimately, compass activities conducted right around the school could lead to map making (scale, spacial relationships), map reading and finally, orienteering.

The skills that can be learned or strenghtned through compass activities are as varied as the knowledge and enthusiasm of the person working with the children. Also, it should be brought out that in this type of activity children are reacting and asserting their own influence, but on a more concrete basis than can be attained by merely sitting in the classroon and reading about the compass and how to use it.

Third, popular in some counties, is the envircnmental center where a class comes to stay for one day up to a full week. The center is usually located in a rural setting, a park or along the coast, depending on the activity that the center stresses. In some cases, one type of physical activity such as climbing or sailing may be the reason why the center is operating while at other centers, a variety of skills might be taught. Environmental centers are owned and operated by the individual counties and, in some cases, a county may establish a center wholly witnin the borders of another county as one often finds in the Lake District in northwest England.

The objectives of a British environmental center seem to fall into three catagories: (1) the training of students in some particular skill, depending upon the center's emphasis, (2) to in some way effect the social attitude of the student and (3) to help apply lessons learned in class to a realistic setting and on a firsthand basis. Obviously, the degree to which all three types of objectives are stressed is dependent upon the center's director and his or her background.

To begin any visit, the center's director first goes to the school to help determine with the teacher the specific reasons for the trip and the best possible ways these objectives may be worked upon. In some cases, the class may be an older group of boys and girls working on their A Level exams - thus a more curriculum-oriented program would be evident. In other cases, the headmaster may organize a group of youngsters who have a hard time getting along with their fellow classmates. For such a group, social activities may be more important for the center to deal with then academics. A program may be organized where group co-operation would be necessary, such as camping, sailing or rock climbing. Furthermore, time would be alloted for the students to discuss the day's affairs and evaluate their progress, in terms of how individuals in the group responded to the needs and feelings of one another and to the group as a whole. A visit to an environmental center is often extremely rewarding and marks the highlight of the year's activities for a class.

PART FOUR: IN CONCLUSION

Environmental education in England is the result of various pressure and interest groups concerned with preserving the rural beauty of the countryside from encroachment by industry along with education's desire to help make that which is to be taught more meaningful and relevant to the lives of students. It does not seem to have resulted froma smooth transition of events.

Since 1945, there has been increased emphasis on (1) insuring an acceptable environment, (2) instituting new architectural designs which allow freer contact with the outside world and (3) attitude changes about the content of British education which has tended to "free-up- a rather traditional philosophy.

As in the United States, the impetus given by certain enthusiastic men and women has been enormous in setting-up environmental centers and promoting school site programs.

Even more interesting is the help, both financial and organizational, which has been given by the county authorities. This has resulted in providing some formal structure to affairs once left to the imagination of a few intereseed teachers and environmentalists. Such organization is not evident in all counties in England. Yet, I feel it is through this source that environmental education will ultimately receive the financial aid and support that it deserves if it is to become a permanent part of the British educational system.

Lastly, environmental objectives do not seem to be neatly stacked all in one catagory. They cover a wide area: from (1) appreciation of aesthetic values (to approach the familiar with new eyes), all the way through (2) outdoor skills, (3) specific environmental concerns, and finally (4) using the out-of-doors for motivational purposes.

In all cases though, I find environmental education being used for the benefit of the child. This, in itself, suggests a willingness by staff to try to turn learning, so often a dull activity for older children, into something meaningful and concrete. In this away, boys and girls may begin to see their education as realistic and something which has to do with their lives. This positive attitude will aid them in becoming more responsible for their own progress in school and hence more self-motivated individuals in the learning process.

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